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Reference eBooks: Does an eBook On The Screen Beat One On The Shelf?

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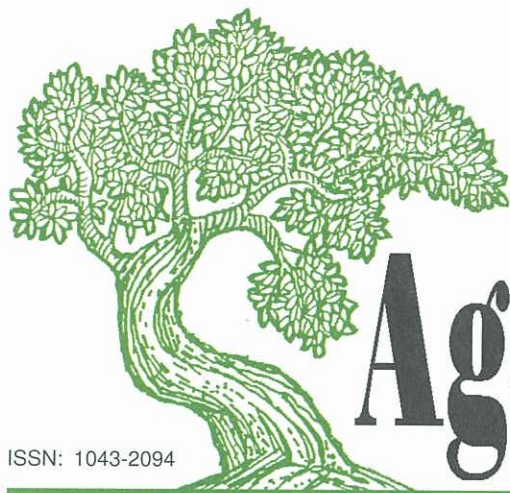
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Against the Grain

"Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"

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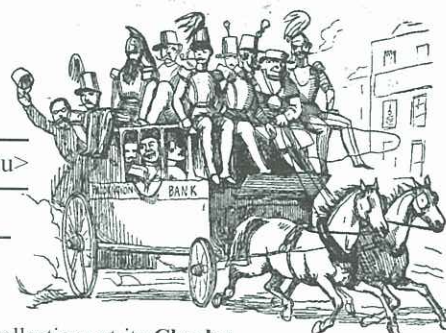
Reference eBooks: Does an eBook On The Screen Beat One On The Shelf?

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In reference publishing the first electronic resources were journal indexes. Now reference books such as handbooks, dictionaries and encyclopedias are widely available electronically with value-added features and acquisition options not available in their print counterparts. Electronic versions of reference eBooks are not limited to just text. They may present information in multiple media formats, for example, the text about a type of bird may be accompanied by video depicting the bird in flight and audio featuring its song. Publishers are developing a variety of ways to acquire these materials; they can be purchased individually or in a package or they can be leased as individual titles or a package of titles. Packages of titles may remain the same or change over time with new titles being added and others being removed. Many library users have rarely or never used print reference resources. Increasingly, they expect all reference materials, including reference books, to be online.

This article explores the rapidly changing world of reference books — the ways that electronic reference books are being selected, purchased, and budgeted. It further asks: once these electronic reference materials are acquired, how do your patrons and librarians react to them? How do libraries promote these resources? To address these issues the authors conducted an interview-style "joint discussion" among seven librarians from five Universities: **The University of Alaska**, the **University of California at Los Angeles**, **Colorado State University**, the **University of New Mexico**, and the **Ohio University**. All but Alaska are **Association of Research Libraries** members. Although all five libraries are members of multiple consortia, three — Alaska, California, and Ohio — are members of consortia that provide extensive collections of electronic reference materials to their members. All answers address system-wide reference e-collections for the reporting University except for **UCLA's** answers that describe only the



collections at its **Charles E. Young Research Library**, covering primarily graduate research collections in humanities, social sciences, and education.

1) *What electronic reference sources does your library currently have? How long have you had them?*

Christina E. ('Trina') Carter, Head of Reference Services, Consortium Library, University of Alaska, Anchorage: "The University of Alaska Anchorage Consortium Library subscribes to a varied group of electronic reference

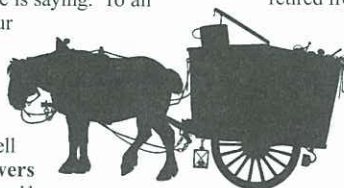
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If Rumors Were Horses

Another summer. Lots happening.

First, **Hurricane Katrina**. The news from New Orleans, Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi is not good. I hope that it is not as bad as everyone is saying. To all our friends in libraries out there, our thoughts and prayers are with you.

A little **human interest** story about two of our own **Charleston Conference** attendees who lived through **Hurricane Katrina** and can tell us firsthand about it. **Susanna Powers** <powersgodblessnola@yahoo.com> and her husband **Johnny Powers** stayed in New Orleans, **Susanna** spent five grueling days in the Superdome while **Johnny** stayed with their home to try to protect it. As matters got worse, **Susanna** came to believe that **Johnny** had perished in the storm and flooding. She wrote her husband's obituary. But! **Johnny** is alive and they are now both together at **Susanna's** sister's house in Ocala, Florida. I talked to them both on the telephone. New Orleans was terrible, they say, but much of the informa-



tion being distributed by the media is wrong. **Susanna** just got her 25 year plaque from **Tulane** where she is **Serials & Electronic Resources Librarian**. **Johnny** is retired from the **University of New Orleans**.

Susanna also saw **Bob Bledsoe**, retired **Acquisitions Librarian** at **Tulane**, at the Superdome and reports that he is fine under the circumstances. Hooray!! And maybe they will be in **Charleston**? We'll have to celebrate!

Philip Blackwell, Chairman, **Blackwell Limited**, has announced the appointment of **Gary Rautenstrauch** as **CEO Blackwell's Book Services**, effective immediately. **Rautenstrauch's** proven track record in distribution and system delivery will help the company accelerate the delivery of service improvements following the implementation of its new order management and distribution system. **Rautenstrauch** will be based at **Blackwell's Book Services** headquarter-

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sources and packages, including these that the Library has had for the last three to five years: **CollegeSource Online** (database of PDFs of college catalogs), **eLibrary** (ProQuest database that includes the full text of many basic encyclopedias, dictionaries, travel guides, and many other standard reference books), **Foundation Directory Online**, **GrantStation**, **Gale's Literature Resource Center** and its **Testing & Education Reference Center**, the **Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism Online**, **Mergent Online**, the **Oxford English Dictionary**, **STAT!Ref** (database of nursing and general medical handbooks and texts), and **World Development Indicators** from the **World Bank**. The **Consortium Library** also provides access through its **NetLibrary** and **Safari Tech Books Online** subscriptions to e-copies of many general, business, and computer-related print titles. New to the **Consortium Library** through the statewide **Databases for Alaskans** project is **Oxford Reference Online**, a collection of more than 100 reference titles from **Oxford University Press**."

Anna Demiller, Coordinator of Collection Development, Library, Colorado State University, Fort Collins: "We have some of the resources from **Gale**; the actual titles we subscribe to have changed since we made our first purchase in 1997. Currently we have their literary databases. We also have **Associations Unlimited**; **Grove Dictionary of Art** since 2000; **Grove Dictionary of Music** since 2001; **BIP** since 2001; **Ulrich's Periodical Directory** since 2001; several **Dekker** "life of the edition" encyclopedias since 2003; and **Colorado Grants Guide** since 2004. Also, from **netLibrary**, we purchased a number of reference titles several years ago."

Johann van Reenen, Assistant Dean of Public and Research Services, and Donna Cromer, Science Reference Co-Coordinator, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque: "We have some of the major dictionaries and encyclopedias including the **Oxford English Dictionary**, the **Encyclopedia of Life Sciences**, the **Grove Dictionary of Art**. The **Grove Dictionary of Music**, and the **Encyclopedia of Astronomy and Astrophysics**. We have had most of these for about five years. A couple of years ago we subscribed to the **Oxford Reference Online** collection and **xreferplus** that are both collections of reference sources. Last year we added some titles from the **Gale Virtual Reference Library**. We have some reference books from **netLibrary**. We subscribe to **Ulrich's Periodicals Directory**, and also to **Bowker's Books in Print** and **Serials Directory**. We have just added the **Birds of North America**, a great tool that takes full advantage of the multimedia capabilities of electronic resources."

Sarah Barbara Watstein, Associate University Librarian for Research & Instructional Services, and Ellen Broidy, Head of YRL Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Ange-

les: "This question cannot be answered by focusing on the **Research Library** because it does not "have" e-resources per se. **UCLA** and the **California Digital Library (CDL)** license resources for the whole campus or the whole system, respectively. With more than 32 million items in their collective holdings, the **UC** libraries make up the largest university research library in the world. Within California the **CDL** (<http://www.cdlib.org/>) "supports the assembly and creative use of the world's scholarship and knowledge for the **UC** libraries and the communities they serve. Established in 1997 as a **UC** library, the **CDL** has become one of the largest digital libraries in the world." **UCLA's** collections, including its reference collections, are directly tied to **CDL's**, with campus input the most critical element in determining what **CDL** collects. Within this arena, and relevant to the issue of e-reference, is the fact that the **CDL** provides access to scholarly materials, databases of journal article abstracts and citations, electronic journals, publishing tools, and reference databases for the **UC** community. <http://www.cdlib.org/collect/>. Major expensive packages are purchased consorcially. Fund managers have complete autonomy over what they select, and their deep understanding of the academic needs of their campus drives independent **UCLA-only** acquisitions decisions. **CRIS' (Collections Research and Instructional Services Department of the Charles E. Young Research Library at UCLA)** Collection Development Policy for Social Sciences and Humanities addresses the diverse formats in the collection and the acquisition of electronic versions in general: "CRIS collects in all appropriate formats — print, electronic (Internet, CD-ROM, DVD, etc.), microform or emerging technologies. When an electronic version of a resource exists, every effort will be made to acquire the electronic format within the limitations of usability, comprehensiveness, space, equipment requirements, and cost." <http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/yrl/reference/collections/sochumpolicy.htm#3>. The **Reference Collection Online** gives some indication of the scope of electronic reference sources: <http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/yrl/reference/rco/refonline.htm>. Here, one can search by subject area or type. An e-resources database, linked from the Library's homepage, facilitates access to these as well as other electronic resources: <http://www2.library.ucla.edu/search/eresources.cfm>."

Julia Zimmerman, Dean of University Libraries, Ohio University, Athens: "We have many, most of which have been acquired over the past 10 years through our membership in **OhioLINK**, the state's extraordinarily successful academic library consortium. **OhioLINK** was founded about 12 years ago with central funding from the state. As budgets flatten (or shrink) an increasing number of resources are funded by member libraries pooling their funds. We get huge "bang for the buck" this way, and it translates into many more e-resources at member libraries — reference sources, e-journals, etc. — than we could otherwise afford. **OhioLINK** provides over 100 electronic reference titles to **Ohio University's** students and faculty. We subscribe to almost 200 more on

our own. We're fortunate to be able to provide such a wealth of e-resources to our students and faculty."

2) Are eBooks from collections like Gale Virtual Reference Library and Oxford Reference Online regularly considered in the routine selection process at your library? Is there a purposeful strategy to collect e-reference titles built into collection development policies?

Trina Carter: "It has only been within the last two years that we have really focused on reducing the number of printed reference titles that we buy, and providing e-access to the same or similar information. In many cases the reference content is freely available online or we have decided it is worth the cost to purchase e-access to it. **Gale's Literature Resource Center** and **Safari Tech Books Online** are two good examples of this."

Anna Demiller: "Yes. We have trialed the **Gale** product but are not pleased with the interface. We rejected the **Oxford** titles out of hand because pricing for our institution is beyond what we can pay at this time even if we don't purchase the print also. Is there a purposeful strategy to collect e-reference titles built into collection development policies?"

Nothing explicitly stated, but it's our culture to prefer electronic access over print and to move as aggressively as possible to electronic only, canceling the print whenever feasible."

Johann van Reenen and Donna Cromer: "We do have a library strategic plan that calls for us to increase our electronic collections, but it does not single out reference books specifically. We have added collections such as the **Oxford Reference Online** package, but it has been a collective decision by the Collection Management and Reference groups rather than by individual selectors for reference materials. Selection of these materials has not yet become part of our routine, but this is beginning to change as publishers increase options and lower their prices coupled with greater patron awareness — requests — for these materials."

Sarah Barbara Watstein and Ellen Broidy: "eBooks from collections like **Gale Virtual Reference Library** and **Oxford Reference Online** are considered by **CRIS** fund managers; however, there is no separate strategy to collect e-reference titles other than the portion of **CRIS' Collection Development Policy** for Social Sciences and Humanities noted above."

Julia Zimmerman: "Yes, our bibliographers consider — and consider very favorably — electronic books from collections like those mentioned above. Electronic access is viewed favorably in purchase decisions for materials of this type because students, particularly, and many faculty find e-resources so convenient."

3) Are collection development and reference librarians in your library putting significant portions of the reference budget into electronic books such as encyclopedias and dictionaries? Are separate budget allocations being set aside for e-reference collecting?

Trina Carter: "Because online reference sources are normally subscriptions, they have

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not been bought with funds used to purchase books, but instead are purchased with serials or database funds since they are recurring annual costs. However, with the last fiscal year, we decided to try using some one-time allocations to do multi-year purchasing of online reference sources. The latest example of this is the purchase of 100 titles within ProQuest's Safari Tech Books Online database."

Anna Demiller: "We are not putting a large portion of the reference budget into eBooks yet. Print and electronic are all in the same budget line; we do track e-purchases separately."

Johann van Reenen and Donna Cromer: "Yes, the amount spent on electronic resources, including reference materials, is growing rapidly. There is an overarching budget for general electronic materials. We also have funds for electronic resources both general reference and in specific subject areas; however, those funds include all types of electronic resources, not just reference books. We are analyzing how we code all electronic purchases in order to provide more detailed statistics to ARL."

Sarah Barbara Watstein and Ellen Broidy: "Yes, fund managers are putting significant portions of the reference budget into electronic resources. Separate extensions on the fund codes facilitate tracking."

Julia Zimmerman: "Yes."

4) Is your library satisfied with the purchase-to-own model being employed by Gale and others? Is that the preferred model for the future? Or is the subscription model of Xrefer more attractive? Why or why not?

Trina Carter: "Gale's ownership model has made us a bit nervous, so we have shied away from it thus far. Subscriptions allow more flexibility and have updates built in. The model employed by Safari Tech Books, that lets us rotate titles into our 100-slot license on an as-needed basis, allows maintenance of a relevant and timely collection in the field of computer science."

Anna Demiller: "We prefer purchase-to-own in all its variations (perpetual access, life of the edition, etc.). Too often the subscription models don't let us pick and choose titles; also, they often charge based on FTE which prices us out."

Johann van Reenen and Donna Cromer: "The purchase-to-own model has benefits in that a library could conceivably, as in print, not choose to purchase an updated edition for a number of years. The selector has to make the same informed decisions about how current the information needs to be as in print. The subscription version means that libraries pay an annual price even if the content has not changed or does not change significantly from year to year. For currency in between purchases there are numerous Internet sources (e.g., Wikipedia or more specific Web-subject fact sources). However, the subscription models often provide very current additions, an advantage for resources in areas such as com-

puter science. For us, the preferred model varies among the subject areas."

Sarah Barbara Watstein and Ellen Broidy: "We are currently in preliminary discussions on the purchase-to-own model with respect to ebrary. The jury is still out, as far as we are concerned, with regard to the preferred model for the future."

Julia Zimmerman: "Purchase-to-own is definitely preferred, not just at our institution, but by OhioLINK and its member institutions as well."

5) When faced with a choice between an electronic version of a new reference title and a print version, is your library now choosing the electronic version? Why or why not?

Trina Carter: "The Consortium Library tries to look first at an online version of a reference source, if one exists, due to the increasing use of e-resources by our patrons, many of whom are enrolled in distance programs. Invariably, they are more expensive than the printed version, which has meant we have bought the printed format or have done without in many cases. There are also several instances where we have been able to obtain a reference database through statewide and/or other consortial arrangements."

Anna Demiller: "We prefer to purchase the electronic so users do not have to come to the library to use them. Researchers can use them in the field; students can access them at two in the morning, and the directory does not come up missing. But if the pricing is not right, the interface is poor, or if there are access issues for distance users, then we still prefer the print."

Johann van Reenen and Donna Cromer: "Electronic. For many (most?) scientists and engineers, if it is not electronic it does not exist. Secondly, in an electronic world, the worker wants to link out to the quick data or fact while in the current work piece. For some titles, we go on a case-by-case basis. If the costs, the user interface, or the contract terms are not acceptable we still purchase the print."

Sarah Barbara Watstein and Ellen Broidy: "In this scenario, we are choosing the electronic version of a new reference title. There are several tipping points for us: our policy as noted in #1 above, ubiquitous access, space considerations, our continuing commitment to developing an electronic library, a related commitment to developing a 24/7 model, and, frankly, what the "accesses" tell us. Online use is increasing exponentially. Gate counts and circulation statistics have decreased."

Julia Zimmerman: "We almost always go for the digital. The vast majority of our users prefer digital-to-the-desktop reference information, journals, and so forth (with the exception of non-reference books.) For distance education this is especially important. We offer several degree programs in Hong Kong, for example, and those students can have access to the resources in a way that would never be possible with hardcopy. Even in the library building, distributed access is an important driver — an e-resource can be used in any department or office, cutting down on duplication of basic reference resources. And in the delivery of online

reference services, librarians can push pages down to chat-reference customers, something that would be almost impossible with paper resources. Finally, space is precious, and e-resources don't take up square footage! We recently reduced our hardcopy reference collection by about two-thirds — and could reduce it still further — creating a lot more reader space. Sometimes, however, we opt for print. Occasionally a digital version of a reference resource is not as complete as the print or it's unnecessarily difficult to use. Pricing can be an issue, too. Sometimes things are priced so much higher than the print version, without associated advantages, that we can't justify the extra cost; or priced way beyond their value to us."

6) How have your patrons reacted to the electronic versions of these reference works? How have your librarians reacted?

Trina Carter: "Patrons and librarians alike appreciate the immediacy and 24/7 access to e-reference titles, but have varying reactions to these resources, largely based on their ease of use. Without naming names, we have dropped several electronic reference sources based on the difficulty in accessing and searching them, relative to their cost."

Anna Demiller: "For the most part patrons and librarians like the electronic versions — the remote access, searchability, and convenience of cut and paste. There are exceptions of course and some grumblings when a familiar print tool goes online and there's that bump of having to learn something new. Less of this though as time goes on."

Johann van Reenen and Donna Cromer: "It varies among the subject areas. The general dictionaries and encyclopedias are very popular but our subject encyclopedias get less use. Our computer science and technology reference books are very heavily used. Of course, the easier the resources are to use, the more popular they are with patrons and librarians alike."

Sarah Barbara Watstein and Ellen Broidy: "E-versions have been well received by patrons and librarians. Indeed, one of our training challenges is to help front-line staff remember the value of some of our myriad print reference resources!"

Julia Zimmerman: "Most patrons appreciate the convenient access of electronic resources of all types. And our librarians are sold on them. There are, of course, trade-offs. Ensuring reliable access takes work. URLs, passwords and search engines change; IP addresses are dropped; servers crash; these events — things that were not issues with hardcopy reference materials — cost librarians time and create barriers for users."

7) How does your library direct student and faculty to these electronic versions? For example: Links from the library catalog? Creating specialized pathfinders? Placing them on your database page?

Trina Carter: "Our electronic reference sources are linked from our alphabetic and discipline/subject-based Library Web pages. We promote them at the reference desk, through li-

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library instruction sessions, and through our active liaison program to faculty. As with our netLibrary books, we will increasingly catalog them to promote access through the online catalog."

Anna Demiller: "We catalog all our electronic resources and put links in the online catalog. Many of the more important encyclopedias and database type resources go on our databases page. Librarians put links on their subject guide Web pages. We haven't made any attempt to pull all of these together in one place."

Johann van Reenen and Donna Cromer: "All of the above. There are links in the catalog and on our subject Web pages. We also have Web pages that list our collections of electronic books and databases."

Sarah Barbara Watstein and Ellen Broidy: "Our homepage serves as the gateway. Through "Search and Find," patrons can link to e-resources, and then to Reference e-resources. It's that simple. Additionally, of course, there's access through our department's Web pages: <http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/rl/reference/index.htm>."

Julia Zimmerman: "Besides records in the library catalog, we've created a system called "InfoTree," which is available from our Web page. It groups important electronic reference and research resources by subject. It gets a significant amount of use by students and faculty. Additionally, patrons can go directly to OhioLINK's Website if they wish. We talk them up in library instruction sessions. We work with faculty to make links to appropriate resources from their course management sites."

8) How else is your library promoting/marketing/advertising that electronic versions of these reference works are available?


Trina Carter: "Along with links to the Library's journal databases, many e-reference sources will be linked from within courses run through our campus courseware, Blackboard. We use our statewide virtual reference service to push pages from these sources, where appropriate. We also send email alerts to the faculty and others in our campus community to remind them of important electronic reference sources in their fields."

Anna Demiller: "If we purchase subject-specific titles, the subject librarians do "PR" with the relevant departments (faculty and grad students primarily) using email and personal contacts. In some cases they have had

success in getting announcements in department newsletters. Major purchases are touted on the library's home page under the monthly Highlights feature and might also be put in the library's newsletter. If the resource goes up on our databases page, it is listed for a while on the New Databases list and gets a "NEW" logo next to its title."

Johann van Reenen and Donna Cromer: "We use our campus-wide email list that is distributed to all our faculty to let them know about new resources and our selectors share information with all departments. We also placed an ad in our student newspaper when we began acquiring large eBook collections. We continue to look for other ways to promote these collections."

Sarah Barbara Watstein and Ellen Broidy: "Our primary vehicle for promotion and marketing remains the Web, and through the avenues mentioned above. Additional promotion and marketing is done by fund managers in their roles as liaisons to their constituents, within the context of information literacy programs, across the reference desk, and through our many print publications."

Julia Zimmerman: "Mostly informally — we take every opportunity to spread the word about the terrific array of resources we offer." 

Reference Classics Ahead of Their Time

by **David Tyckoson** (Head of Public Services, Henry Madden Library, California State University - Fresno)
<davety@csufresno.edu>

At the summer 2005 annual **American Library Association** conference in Chicago, one of the programs most of interest to readers of the reference issue of *Against the Grain* was titled "Once and Future Reference Classics." During this program, which honored the 75th anniversary of the *Reference Books Bulletin* section of *Booklist*, several speakers discussed what makes a classic reference source. **Mary Ellen Quinn**, editor of *Reference Books Bulletin*, started the program by quoting from some original reviews of sources that became classics and discussed the properties that make classics endure. Speaking in jest, **Jim Rettig** had the easiest answer: if it's in his book *Distinguished Classics of Reference Publishing*, it's a classic. If it's not in the book, it's not a classic. Seriously addressing the program's theme, he discussed what is necessary to create an electronic classic. **Merle Jacob** of the **Chicago Public Library** provided a list of criteria explaining what makes a classic for small libraries, the main points being that the book be concise and inexpensive. **Casper Grathwohl** of **Oxford University Press** discussed the editorial process behind the creation of a classic reference title, of which **Oxford** has produced as many or more than any other publisher. Each speaker provided a different take on what makes a classic reference source.

All of this talk about classic reference works got me thinking. From my own review of some key reference sources from the past, it was clear that some publishers tried to create a classic reference source by introducing new innovations in format or content. Often those publishers introduced good concepts, but the information delivery mechanisms of the day were not quite up to the task of making the resulting tools easy to use. Looking back with the hindsight of today's information technologies, those innovations would probably be taken for granted. However,

in the older, non-electronic days, they were not always as well received as the publishers intended. Even when the publishers had some very good ideas, their products were cumbersome to use without the searching and linking advantages that we have today.

It is time to honor a few of these classics (or should-have-been-classics) of the past. Some of them have indeed become reference classics, some were classics that became non-classics, and at least one is a relic that should only be found in a museum (if, in fact, anyone saved a copy). However, the concepts used in each of these sources presaged the Internet and electronic resources in one way or another. They have all contributed to the development of reference and all deserve some kind of award. Lacking any official awards that apply in this situation, this author and *Against the Grain* proudly present the *Before Their Time* awards.

What Were They Thinking Award

The **What Were They Thinking Award**, offered to a concept that made a great source more difficult to use, goes to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. From the 1770s to the 1970s, *Britannica* was the standard of English-language encyclopedias. Its entries were accurate, scholarly, and well documented. In fact, *Britannica* typified the very concept of the encyclopedia. It was often imitated, but never duplicated.

Unfortunately, that was apparently not good enough for **Mortimer J. Adler** and the other *Britannica* editors of the 1960s. They wanted to try something new, different, and innovative. Thus was born the famous (or infamous) *Britannica 3*, or *New Encyclopedia Britannica*, the tripartite revision that divided the world's knowledge into the Propedia, Micropedia, and the Macropedia. The concept behind this was that the user could start with an outline (Propedia), read a brief factual account of their topic (Micropedia), or read a lengthy scholarly treatise (Macropedia). Users

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